

Commercial and Industrial Buildings,

Dubuque Ice Harbor

Dubuque

Dubuque County

Iowa

HABS No. IA-160-AQ

HABS

IOWA

31-DUBU,

13-AQ-

PHOTOGRAPHS
HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
P.O. Box 25287
Denver Colorado 80225

Dubuque Ice Harbor

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IOWA,
31 - DUBUQUE
13-AQ-

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Site Location: Dubuque, Dubuque County, Iowa
DOT designation: Resource Site No. 7.30
USGS quadrangle: Dubuque South Iowa 7.5'
UTM coordinates: 15.692320.4707320
Present Usage: harbor
Present Condition : good

Construction Date: 1882-1886

Physical History : Local interest in constructing a harbor in the Mississippi River at Dubuque began in 1836, only three years after the first permanent settlement of the town. At that time Gen. George W. Jones, then Iowa Territory's delegate to Congress, suggested that the city petition Congress for the right to sell lots in order to raise funds for the construction of such a facility. After a five year's delay in which the city made some tentative efforts to dredge a channel through the slough between the natural inner and outer harbors of the river, this was done in 1841. The Army Corps of Engineers subsequently surveyed the Dubuque shoreline in 1844. Based on the survey, a site north of the present Ice Harbor was selected as the preferred site, and in 1846 dredging began under the supervision of Captain Joshua Barney.

Congress had appropriated \$7,500, and later an additional \$7,000, for the harbor improvement: allocations that were grossly undersized for the amount of work required to create a useful landing. In November 1846 the Dubuque city council complained of Barney's inactivity. But Barney was under the aegis of the Topographical Bureau, and this federal agency had directed the captain to make what came to be known as the "Barney Cut" from the river's main channel to the inner levee. With inadequate funding to fill portions of the surrounding slough or dredge a more suitable harbor, Barney was restricted to the partial construction of the channel while the city awaited further appropriations from Congress.

The money was not forthcoming, however, and after this initial effort to build a harbor failed, the city formulated a new plan which called for the extension of First, Third and Seventh streets from the levee out to the main channel of the Mississippi River. Thus, if Dubuque could not have a harbor proper, the city would extend itself directly to the edge of the river. This was accomplished by the partial filling of the sloughs and the construction of causeways. "There is now a bridge across the slough and connecting the main island with the business part of the city," the *Dubuque Express and Herald* reported in 1855. "Boats are now landing on the outer island and hacks and carts are running to and from Main Street to the deep water of the Mississippi. This is an important fact for Dubuque. Seventh street also will soon be completed to the deep water of the main river." Dubuque was apparently satisfied

with the street extension solution for over three decades, but in the spring of 1882 interest in the construction of a harbor was revived.

Based on a survey made by Major Mackenzie two years earlier, the new proposal for a harbor called for the widening and dredging of Waple's Cut, an early ferry passage through the islands of the Mississippi River. The harbor's floor would be dredged to a level of six feet below low water level of the river and the bay sized to accommodate twenty steamers and fifty barges. Financing for the ambitious project came from \$13,000 that remained in the old Harbor Improvement Company treasury, combined with a \$20,000 appropriation from Congress in 1884. By the end of 1886, as construction was beginning for the first wagon bridge over the Mississippi at Dubuque, the Ice Harbor had been completed. It has since functioned as a river loading area for the city and a winter harbor for boats and barges. In 1973 a flood wall and gate were built across the harbor's entrance to protect it from high water on the river.

Significance: The history of river improvements in general, and the Ice Harbor specifically, represents the most ambitious public works effort ever undertaken by the City of Dubuque. The Ice Harbor and the preceding efforts to improve the city's river facilities were the first such projects on the upper Mississippi financed by Congress. Also, the area surrounding the Ice Harbor from the earliest days of Dubuque's existence been the focus of the city's inter-city transportation facilities. Furthermore, Second Street, which connects the Ice Harbor with St. Raphael's Cathedral has for many years been recognized as a dominant axis in the city's design scheme. Today plans are underway to renovate and improve the Second Street area, as well as the north side of the Ice Harbor, as a recreation and tourist area.

References:

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